

Commission for Women

Volume 42

Newsletter of the Montgomery County Commission for Women

June 2003

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Seminar Series Focuses on Immigrant Women's Issues

By Tracy Stuger

On June 4, 2003, more than 60 Montgomery County residents attended a special seminar convened by the Commission for Women. The purpose of the seminar was to provide an overview of the issues facing immigrant women in Montgomery County. This first in a series of four seminars provided participants with background and a general overview regarding the opportunities and challenges faced by immigrant women in the county. The expert panelists included **Patricia Hatch**, Program Manager with the Maryland Office for New Americans; **Deanna Jang**, Senior Civil Rights Analyst with the Office for Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; and **Alexandra Teaff**, Executive Director of the Charles Gilchrist Center for Cultural Diversity. The panel was moderated by **Jinhee Wilde, Esq.**, a community activist and an attorney at Johnson and Yang, P.C. specializing in international and immigration law.

The panelists discussed a variety of perspectives on the topic of immigrant women. Deanna Jang discussed national policies affecting immigrant and refugee women. Patricia Hatch provided insightful demographic information about the immigrant population in Montgomery County. Alexandra

Teaff discussed the vast array of services available at the Gilchrist Center in Wheaton including ESOL classes, small business development programs, and citizenship classes. (Continued on page 3)



Commissioner Yun Yang, chair of the IWin Committee, welcomes attendees to *A Brave New World* seminar



President's Message

By Anne Sanderoff-Walker

Choices are what the battle for equal rights is all about. I am reminded of this as my oldest niece, Rachel graduates from college and heads to graduate school, studying earth sciences. My youngest niece, Avery starts middle school next fall and had the confidence to go after, and win a spot in the arts magnet school in her community. Rachel's mom is the head of the math department of a local high school and Avery's mom is a pharmacist. When I was in high school, most of the math teachers and pharmacists were men. Things have changed, but not for everyone.

The glass ceiling has been shattered by some women, but the issue of sticky floors for many of the women in our community is an ongoing problem. Approximately 50% of the students in our schools come from families for whom English is a second language. The majority of the new Americans in the state of Maryland, whether documented or not, live in Montgomery County. Many of these members of our community fill the minimum wage jobs that do not require extensive language skills. The low wages require more hours working to provide for their families and less time for the educational opportunities to increase language skills, therefore getting "stuck" in the low wage jobs.

The parents of all of the children in our schools want the same things for their children, a safe environment, a good education, and the right to choose what opportunities to take advantage of. But it is up to us to provide those opportunities. All students must hear that computers are not just for boys, that girls are just as capable in the math and sciences as anyone else, and that the path to successful careers starts with the correct courses taken as early as 6th grade.

Two current projects of the Commission for Women address these issues. The "GURLS" Computer Camps provides the opportunity for middle school girls to attend a two week summer camp that introduces them to the magic of computers. The camps are held on the campuses of Montgomery College and many girls who may never have thought about college can now picture themselves in a campus environment. Many of these campers attend on scholarships provided by public and private funding. Just being on a college campus expands the possibilities these girls can dream for themselves.

Another project of the Commission for Women is a series of seminars titled "A Brave New World: Challenges and Opportunities for Immigrant Women in Montgomery County." Experts on the issues of immigrant women will make up panels addressing the subjects of health and safety, education, and economic empowerment as they pertain to this particular segment of our community. It is vital that we understand these challenges and provide the opportunities for everyone to improve their lives. All children should have the tools to enable them to take advantage of the choices that Rachel and Avery were given.

A Brave New World Seminar Series

(continued from page 1)

In July 2002, the Commission for Women created the Immigrant Women in (IWin) Montgomery County committee to examine the issues faced by immigrant women and their families. In an effort to provide insight, experience and recommendations on these issues, the committee has planned a series of four seminars on immigrant women. The seminars focus on a range of social, cultural and economic issues facing immigrant women and their families, and will provide critical information and an opportunity for the attendees to begin working together toward forming solutions.

The U.S. Census 2000 indicates that Montgomery County has by far the largest population, and percent, of foreign born residents of any jurisdiction in Maryland. The Maryland Department of Planning reports that Montgomery County's foreign born population approaches 233,000 residents (26.7% of the county's total population).

This changing demographic has presented challenges to public services, the schools, the individual immigrants and their families, and community organizations seeking to be representative of the county's constituency. However, it is often the immigrant woman who faces the most serious challenges. All too often, she is employed in low wage jobs, with no benefits, little knowledge of the laws protecting her rights as an employee, and no access to that information or to agencies that could help. When she is a parent, her ability to interface with her children's schools and other service providers may be seriously compromised. She may be afraid to seek help from the police, health or social services agencies, should that become necessary, and if she does seek help, language may present still another barrier. Women in these situations are far more vulnerable to abuse, harassment, discrimination, and worse. The upcoming seminars will focus on some of these challenges.

The next seminar will be held on *Wednesday, September 17, 2003* and will focus on **Education Issues for Immigrant Women and their Families**. Speakers for the September seminar will be **Teresa Wright**, Parent Resource Teacher, Montgomery County Public Schools; **Tuyet Tran**, Parent Specialist, Montgomery County Public Schools; **Raqiya D. Abdalla**, President, Somali Family Care Network; and **Nancy Navarro**, Executive Co-Director, Centro Familia. The discussion will be moderated by **Ginny Gong**, Director, Montgomery County Community Use of Public Facilities.

The third in the series of seminars will be held on *Wednesday, October 15, 2003* and will highlight the **Health, Safety and Domestic Violence Issues for Immigrant Women**. Speakers on this panel include **Jean Bruggeman**, Legal Services Coordinator, Boat People SOS, Inc.; **Linda Dominguez**, Assistant District Council, U.S. Department of Homeland Security; **Corporal Meredith Dominick**, Domestic Violence Unit, Montgomery County Police Department; **Jeredine Williams**, Executive Director, Migrant and Refugee Cultural Support, Inc. (MIRECS); **Sonia Mora**, Executive Director, Latino Health Initiative, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services. This panel will be moderated by **Nadja Cabello**, Program Manager, Victim Assistance and Sexual Assault Program, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services.

The final discussion will be on **Employment and Economic Issues for Immigrant Women** on *Wednesday, November 12, 2003*. Panelists for this seminar include **Kim Propeack**, Esq., Director of Advocacy, CASA of Maryland; **Leticia Vasquez**, Worker Advocate, DC Employment Justice Center; **Hope Braveheart**, Refugee Partnership Coordinator, Leadership Training Institute, John F. Kennedy High School; **Pary Karadaghi**, Executive Director, Kurdish Human Rights Watch. **Wanda Resto Torres** of the County Executive Office of Community Liaison will be the moderator for this panel.

The Brave New World Seminar Series is co-sponsored in partnership with CASA de Maryland, Migrant and Refugee Cultural Support (MIRECS), the County Executive's Office of Community Outreach and the Montgomery County Office of Human Rights. Financial support for the seminars has been provided by Global Employment Network and Johnson and Yang, P.C.

Registration forms are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cfw. Completed forms may be emailed to cfw@montgomerycountymd.gov or faxed to 301-279-1318.

Kilgore Champions Literacy

By Whitney Pollock

“Each one teach one.” This basic slogan has propelled Elizabeth Kilgore through nearly forty years of literacy promotion. Mrs. Kilgore is the founder and honorary president of the Literacy Council of Montgomery County (LCMC), a private, non-profit organization dedicated to helping adults in Montgomery County learn to speak, read, write and understand English.

Inspired by Dr. Frank Laubach, missionary and founder of the Northern Virginia Literacy Council, Mrs. Kilgore established her own program in 1963. By 1967, LCMC members adopted a constitution and the organization was incorporated. Mrs. Kilgore drew support from the community in the form of volunteers and donations, conducting meetings from her home and local places of worship.

In addition to her work with LCMC, Mrs. Kilgore has championed literacy on virtually every level. She has devoted 1,000 hours of her own tutoring students plus countless additional hours to organize and administer the literacy program she started as Asbury Methodist Village in Gaithersburg, which allows Asbury residents to teach English to Asbury employees. Mrs. Kilgore has also campaigned for National Literacy Week before Maryland legislators and Congress. Mrs. Kilgore's efforts have exceeded the domestic cause as she has worked in conjunction with literacy volunteers worldwide. Since 1963, Mrs. Kilgore has demonstrated continued leadership by example, characterized by an unmatched passion and dedication.

Mrs. Kilgore's volunteer efforts earned her recognition in May 2002 by the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Recognized as the Literacy Challenge Committee Eastern Division Winner for Outstanding Service of a DAR Member, Kilgore was commended by a national judge for her “thriving commitment towards literacy.” In honor of Mrs. Kilgore's award, the City of Gaithersburg proclaimed November 1, 2002 to be National Family Literacy Day.

The mission of LCMC is to tutor adults living or working in the county who want to achieve functional levels of reading, writing and speaking English so that they may improve the quality of their lives and their ability to participate in the community. LCMC provides free tutoring to approximately 1,100 adults in Montgomery County each year. It is also an affiliate of ProLiteracy America, a division of ProLiteracy Worldwide, the world's largest volunteer adult-literacy organization.

To supplement its reading, writing and conversational English instruction, LCMC offers citizenship classes and weekly conversation classes. A truly multi-faceted organization, LCMC developed an English-as-a-second-language (ESL) program as early as 1968 to serve the growing foreign-born immigrant population in Montgomery County.

According to Mrs. Kilgore, “from the beginning it was my goal to provide help to those who needed help...to provide the opportunity...to have the joy of teaching and becoming a ‘door opener.’” Whether the objective is filling out a job application, reading to a child, the literate individual has the self-respect and confidence to achieve it. Thanks to Mrs. Kilgore's tireless door-opening, thousands of people have walked through, fostering the ability to reach their goals.

For more information on the Literacy Council of Montgomery County (LCMC), visit www.literacycouncilmcmd.org.

2003 Summer Computer Camps for Middle School Girls

By Clotilde Puertolas

After attending one of the sessions of the 2002 Summer Computer Camps for Girls hosted at Montgomery College, a 12 year-old student enthusiastically announced that “now I feel more comfortable with computers and can’t wait to sign-up for more classes!” Another 12 year-old girl said that, “The reason I came to Gurl Power Camp was because I wasn’t all that good with computers and I wanted to learn more about it ...and it gives me something to be better at than my brother.” Both girls attended the camp on a scholarship provided by the Montgomery County Commission for Women. They were among 71 girls from Montgomery County middle schools who attended the special two-week computer camp. Thirty-eight of the 71 girls attending were granted scholarships by the Commission for Women.



This summer, Montgomery College in partnership with the Montgomery County Commission for Women and the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) is again offering two camps, GURL Power Camp (Website Design for Girls) and Computer Programming for Girls. The camps will be held at the three campuses of Montgomery College: Takoma Park, Germantown, and Rockville. As in previous years, the Commission will provide scholarships to ensure that girls from low income families and girls for whom English is a second language have an opportunity to attend the camps. Funding for scholarships is provided by the Montgomery County Government and by private donations.

Nationally, only 17% of all high school students taking advanced placement tests in computer science are girls. Young women account for only about 28% of all computer science college graduates and this percentage has been decreasing in recent years. Girls of low income and those for whom English is a second language are even less likely to study information technology. Locally, Montgomery County Public School (MCPS) officials estimated that of all the students taking computer classes, 80% take computer application courses where they learn how to use applications someone else has written. Only about 20% of students take programming classes. However, of those students who take programming classes where software development is taught, less than 20% are girls.

In order to address the disparity in the participation rates of girls and boys in computer programming classes, the Commission for Women formed the Girls in Technology Committee in 1999 composed of staff from MCPS and Montgomery College. The establishment of a Summer Computer Camp for Middle School Girls was one of the first goals of the committee. Since its inception, the summer computer camps have continued to introduce girls to the world of computer programming through the use of web site design and computer programming. From 1999 to 2002, 198 girls have attended the Summer Computer Camp for Middle School Girls, 109 of these participated on scholarships. The curriculum, designed just for middle school girls, has been so successful that in 2001 the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor asked the Commission for Women to develop a model of the curriculum used at the summer camps to encourage other jurisdictions across the nation to develop similar programs.

The membership of the Girls and Technology Committee has expanded to include representatives from Discovery Communications Inc., NIST, Celera and other organizations. For more information about the Commission for Women's Girls in Technology Initiative, please visit www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cfw or call 240-777-8330.

Office on Women's Health Promotes National Women's Health Week

By Clotilde Puertolas

During the last century, medical research and treatment have improved considerably, enabling women to lead healthier lives and to live longer than ever before. Life expectancy for American women has significantly increased, jumping from 51 years in 1900 to 80 years in 2000. Despite this important development, many women die annually of diseases that could be prevented and treated if they were detected at earlier stages. Heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes are among the leading causes of death among U.S. women.

Heart disease is the number one killer of all women. In fact, more women die of heart disease each year than men. Lung cancer is the top cancer killer among American women, followed by breast cancer and colorectal cancer. Stroke is the third leading cause of death for American women, but it occurs at a higher rate among African American women and Hispanic American women. Each year, 30,000 more women than men have strokes. Diabetes is the fifth leading cause of death in women. An estimated 17 million Americans have diabetes. Eight million of them are women. Sexually transmitted diseases and HIV have also a major effect on women's health. In the U.S., there are an estimated 40,000 new HIV infections each year with about 30% of reported infections occurring in women.

Awareness and prevention are keys to improving women's health. Since 2000, the Office on Women's Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has led a campaign and an alliance among health professionals, advocacy groups and local governments to raise awareness about women's health by instituting a **National Women's Health Week** held each May. This year's event was held from May 11 to May 17.

The *National Women's Health Week* is a national effort to incorporate preventative and positive health behaviors into everyday life. It encourages awareness about key health issues affecting all women. Special attention is also given to women of African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic American, and American Indian/Alaska Native descent, since research has demonstrated that there are significant health disparities among these groups compared to white women.

This year, as part of National Women's Health Week, the Office on Women's Health initiated the first National Women's Check-Up Day, scheduled on May 12. The National Women's Check-Up Day highlights the importance of getting regular check-ups and asking a doctor about screening for heart disease, diabetes, cancer and other diseases. To help women with this process, the Department of Health and Human Services has issued a women's health tool, *Women: Stay Healthy at Any Age: Checklist for Your Next Checkup* available at www.ahrq.gov/ppip/healthywom.pdf. The brochure provides guidelines on screening tests and recommendations on how to stay healthy. Hundreds of community health centers, hospitals and health care providers nationwide committed themselves to educate, screen and advise women on preventive health issues on May 12. During the week of May 11 to May 17, almost every state celebrated National Women's Health Week with forums and conferences, radio shows, health fairs, displays and exhibits. To learn more about National Women's Health Week, visit: www.4women.gov/whw.

Daily Record Lists Maryland's Top 100 Women

In order to recognize the outstanding achievements of women in Maryland, the *Daily Record* created an annual program to honor 100 women in the state who have distinguished themselves in their profession and have made significant strides in their community.

The Commission for Women is proud to recognize the Montgomery County women leaders who were recently selected among Maryland's Top 100 Women by the *Daily Record* for 2003. The list includes: Judge Marielsa Bernard, Associate Judge, Circuit Court for Montgomery County; Ellen Coren Bogage, Director of Public Affairs, Comcast Cable Communications, Inc.; Delegate Jean B. Cryor, Maryland General Assembly, Councilmember Nancy Marie Floreen, Montgomery County Council; Senator Jennie M. Forehand, Maryland General Assembly; Dr. Claire M. Fraser, President and Director, The Institute for Genomic Research; Dr. Jennie C. Hunter-Cevera, President, University of Maryland Biotechnology Institute; Cheryl Kagan, Executive Director, Carl M. Freeman Foundation; Constance Morella, Former Congresswoman, U.S. House of Representatives; Dr. Charlene Nunley, President, Montgomery College; Deborah Ann Yancer, President, Shady Grove Adventist Hospital.

Calendar of Events

All workshops and seminars listed will be held at 401 N. Washington Street, Suite 100, Rockville, MD unless otherwise noted. Registration is required. The following is only a partial list of the workshops and seminars offered. Please call 240-777-8300 for registration and further information.

LIVING SINGLE.....AGAIN

Tuesday, July 8, 2003, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

If you find yourself on your own after the kids have left, or a relationship has ended, etc., join us for an exploration of what this life change offers. Led by Diane Halvorsen, MSW and Mediator. 1 session. Registration required. Fee: **\$10.00** Out of County Residents: **\$15.00**

HOW TO WRITE A BUSINESS PLAN

Tuesday, July 15, 2003, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

This seminar will review the various aspects of business plans and how to create them. Presented by Ellen Lang, CPA. 1 session. Registration required. Fee: **\$10.00** Out of County Residents: **\$15.00**

BACK TO SCHOOL: How to Advocate for Your Child in the School System

Tuesday, August 12, 2003, 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Every child needs a person who can speak on behalf of her best interests. Learn how to effectively talk to your child's school personnel, avoid potential difficulties, and find appropriate solutions if problems occur. Presented by Judith M. Glasser, Ph. D. 1 session. Registration required. Fee: **\$10.00** Out of County Residents: **\$15.00**

CREATIVE RETIREMENT: Strategies for Transition

Thursday, August 14, 2003, 7:00 – 8:45 p.m.

Learn how to address the question of "what next" through interactive skill building and meaningful strategies. The discussion and exercises will focus on meeting the challenges of life stage change and the enhancement of choices to bring about a new beginning. 1 session. Registration required. Fee: **\$10.00** Out of County Residents: **\$15.00**

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Save the Date!!!

Wednesday, September 17, 2003

Education Issues for Immigrant Women & Their Families

6:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Montgomery County Commission for Women
401 North Washington Street – Suite 100
Rockville, Maryland 20850
For more information please call 240-777-8330

FEATURED SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

Teresa Wright, Program Resource Teacher, Division of ESOL/Bilingual Program
Montgomery County Public Schools

Tuyet Tran, Parent Specialist, Division of ESOL/Bilingual Program
Montgomery County Public Schools

Raqiya D. Abdalla, President, Somali Family Care Network

Nancy Navarro, Executive Co-Director, Centro Familia

Moderated By: **Ginny Gong**, Director
Montgomery County Community Use of Public Facilities